

# Smart Spend: The Science of Why We Buy

## Lesson Overview

This lesson explores the psychology and external influences behind consumer behavior. Students will learn to identify why they want what they want and develop practical skills to become "wise shoppers" who can see through marketing tactics.

## Learning Objectives

- **Identify** the internal and external factors that influence consumer choices (needs vs. wants, peer pressure, and marketing).
- **Analyze** common marketing tactics designed to trigger impulse buys.
- **Apply** "wise shopping" strategies, such as unit pricing and review analysis, to make an informed purchasing decision.
- **Evaluate** the long-term impact of mindful spending versus impulsive spending.

## Materials Needed

- Access to the internet (for price comparisons) or local grocery/retail flyers.
- Notebook or digital document for brainstorming.
- "The Influencer Audit" worksheet (can be a simple 3-column table: Item, Claim, Reality).
- A recent receipt or a memory of a recent purchase.

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## 1. The Hook: The "Regret or Reward" Reflection (10 Minutes)

**Scenario:** Think about the last thing you bought with your own money (or asked a parent to buy). It could be a snack, a video game skin, or a pair of sneakers.

- On a scale of 1-10, how much did you want it *before* you bought it?
- On a scale of 1-10, how much do you use or value it *now*?
- **Discussion:** If there is a drop in the number, why? Did the "hype" wear off? Was it as good as the ad promised?

## 2. I DO: The "Invisible Pull" (Content Delivery) (15 Minutes)

Instructional Note: Use these points to explain the factors affecting choices.

### The Three Big Influencers:

- **Internal Factors (The Heart and Brain):** Your personal values, your mood (retail therapy is real!), and your basic needs. 14-year-olds often buy for *identity*—buying things that help show the world who they are.
- **Social Factors (The Crowd):** Peer pressure isn't just someone telling you what to buy; it's

"social proof." If everyone on your feed has a specific water bottle or hoodie, your brain marks that item as a "necessity" for social survival.

- **Marketing Factors (The Trap):** Brands use specific tactics:
  - *Scarcity:* "Only 2 left in stock!" or "Limited edition drop!"
  - *Celebrity/Influencer Endorsement:* If someone you admire uses it, you subconsciously believe you'll be more like them if you buy it.
  - *Loss Aversion:* "Don't miss out!" Humans hate losing things more than we like winning them.

### 3. WE DO: The Influencer Audit (15 Minutes)

Let's look at a popular social media post or a YouTube "unboxing" video together.

- **Step 1:** Identify the "hook." What emotion are they trying to make you feel? (Excitement, FOMO, the desire to be "cool"?)
- **Step 2:** Look for the "hidden" influences. Is there a "sponsored" tag? Is the lighting making the product look better than it is in real life?
- **Step 3:** The Reality Check. Search for "honest reviews" or "common problems with [Product Name]" to see the other side of the story.

### 4. YOU DO: The "Wise Shopper" Simulation (20 Minutes)

**The Mission:** You have a hypothetical \$60 to spend on a specific category (e.g., a new pair of workout headphones or a week's worth of your favorite snacks/drinks).

1. **Comparison Shop:** Find the item at three different retailers. Note the price, shipping costs, and return policies.
2. **Calculate Unit Price:** If buying snacks/drinks, calculate the price per ounce. Is the "Family Pack" actually a better deal, or is it just more expensive?
3. **The "24-Hour Rule":** Write down why you want this item. Now, wait (simulated). List three reasons why you might *not* need it or how that \$60 could be used elsewhere (opportunity cost).
4. **Final Decision:** Which one would you buy and why? Your choice must be justified by at least two pieces of data (e.g., "It had better reviews" and "the unit price was lower").

### 5. Conclusion & Recap (10 Minutes)

**Summary:** Being a wise shopper isn't about never spending money; it's about making sure *you* are the one making the choice, not a marketing algorithm.

- **Review Key Terms:** What is Scarcity? What is Social Proof? What is Opportunity Cost?
- **The Takeaway:** Before your next purchase, ask: "Am I buying this because I need it, or because I'm being told I need it?"

### Assessment (Success Criteria)

- **Formative:** The student can correctly identify at least two marketing tactics in a real-world advertisement during the "We Do" section.
- **Summative:** The student completes the "Wise Shopper Simulation" with a written justification that includes comparison data and a consideration of "needs vs. wants."

## Differentiation & Adaptability

- **For Advanced Learners:** Research "Dark Patterns" in web design (how websites trick you into clicking things) and present a 2-minute summary.
- **For Struggling Learners:** Use a physical "Needs vs. Wants" card sort game before moving into the marketing analysis.
- **Classroom/Group Variant:** Turn the "Comparison Shop" into a competition where teams try to find the absolute lowest price for a "Back to School" list, including coupons and discounts.